

Castlemaine Naturalist

April 2017

Vol. 42.3 #452

Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Nankeen Kestrel - photo Joy Weatherill

Maintaining the Perkins legacy

Members of CFNC and other organisations in our region are enormously indebted to Ern and Lesley Perkins for their decades of detailed surveys of plants, birds and landscapes, and Ern's extraordinary series of publications. Many of us are concerned to ensure that this legacy is maintained and updated so that the information remains relevant and available for use by all concerned with the natural environment in the Mt Alexander area.

At a meeting in February, representatives from CFNC, FOBIF, Connecting Country, Friends of Kaweka and the Wettenhall Foundation met to consider ideas for meeting the challenges of maintaining Ern's achievements. We identified six project areas involving publications (an Acacia guide, loading the Flora Guide on the web, and the many leaflets and brochures) and ongoing monitoring (bird surveys, plant surveys using quadrats and the PhotoPoint landscape surveys).

At the launch of the FOBIF guide "Eucalypts of the Mt Alexander Region" Ern Perkins said that a book on Acacias should be next. Bernie Slattery and George Broadway felt that this would be a perfect tribute to Ern, so Bernie is leading this project, based on Ern's extensive information on Acacias. The invaluable electronic flora guide *Wild Plants of the Castlemaine District*, released by Ern in 2016 on USB memory sticks, will be made available via the web by CFNC. We will be arranging for an expert "editorial committee" to manage future additions to the guide. The third publication project aims to maintain the many information leaflets prepared by Ern, available at low cost through the Castlemaine Information Centre and other outlets. As well as republishing updated versions as required, Beth Mellick (Wettenhall Foundation) is proposing that the leaflets also be published as a spiral bound guide book to the natural riches of our region.

Ern and Lesley carried out standard 20 minute, 2 ha surveys of birds at about 14 sites around Castlemaine, on most months over many years; Ern collated the data and forwarded it to BirdLife. Lesley and her daughter Anne are continuing six of these surveys, while Rosemary and Peter Turner are doing two along Forest Creek. We will be seeking additional birdwatchers prepared to take on the other sites. Tanya Loos (Connecting Country) will coordinate the transfer of the data to BirdLife. A number of CFNC members worked with Ern and Lesley on detailed plant surveys, using 20m x 20 m quadrats and sets of 1m x 1m quadrats spaced along lines. Richard Piesse has commenced the task of identifying which surveys are of highest priority to repeat, given recent impacts of fire and weather. The third monitoring project is the PhotoPoint records of changes in landscapes - hundreds of spots around the region where Ern took photos in the early 1990s, early 2000s and again in 2010/11. These were collated onto the CD in collaboration between Connecting Country and CFNC, released in 2013. George Broadway has been reviewing the images and will speak about the project, and proposals for continuing the series, at a future CFNC meeting.

Finally, all of us involved are deeply appreciative of the support that Lesley and Anne Perkins have provided for the initial planning of these projects, by making Ern's computer files and many folders of data available. Lesley has offered assistance, with (for example) explaining the bird surveys to the volunteers who take over, and identifying the information leaflets that Ern had decided needed updating.

- George Broadway and Peter Turner

2016 Challenge Bird Count

By Chris Morris and Chris Timewell

For many years, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club has participated in the various incarnations of the annual Challenge Bird Count that is coordinated by Birdlife Australia. On the first weekend in December each year, teams of club members and supporters spread out across the greater Castlemaine region to document as many birds as possible. Elsewhere across Australia, other teams of birdwatchers are doing the same across their local patch.

The rules of the event are:

For a bird to be recorded, it must either be seen by at least 2 members of the team or heard by at least 3 members of the team.

The search area must be no more than a 25km radius from a central point.

Birds can be recorded from midnight to midnight on a designated day.

Multiple teams can operate within an area, but each group will ideally have at least one experienced birdwatcher.

Maintain the good name of Birdlife Australia.
Have fun!

For the past five or more years, Chris 'Kit' Morris has been coordinating the Castlemaine teams, compiling the results, and submitting the data to Birdlife – including in 2016. However, Kit has also been training Chris Timewell in the process over the past couple of weeks, and the latter will take on the fun role of managing CFNC's participation in the Challenge Bird Count from 2017 onwards.

In 2016, the club had four teams scouring the local area for birds. Peter Turner's team (with Rosemary Turner, Ron Wescott and Cherly Taylor) surveyed around Colles Rd, Moonlight Flat, Blakeley Rd and the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens. Geraldine Harris's team (with Geoff Harris, and Phil and Judy Hopley) explored Sawmill Rd, the Asylum Reserve, north-west Muckleford through Fogarty's Gap, the Harcourt Reservoir and Barkers Creek. Chris Timewell's team (with Kerrie Jennings, Kerry Peacoulakis, Jane Mitchell and Lisa Minchin) surveyed along the Loddon River through Baringhup, Bell's Swamp and the Nuggetty Ranges. Tanya Loos – with 16 members of her Connecting Country birdwatching crew – explored an area of forest to the southeast of the Campbell's Creek township.

In summary, 84 bird species were recorded from the Castlemaine area comprising 1110 individuals. This is a little bit down compared to previous years, but the weather across this weekend was quite hot. [In 2014, we recorded 103 species and 1789 individuals. In 2015, we recorded 106 species and 2087 individuals.]. Thirteen of these bird species in 2016 were also recorded breeding at the time of the survey, which is quite high compared to previous years.

The highlights of this year's list were breeding observations of Powerful Owls at the botanic gardens, a Jacky Winter nest at the Children's cemetery, an owlet-nightjar near Campbell's Creek, Olive-backed Orioles in Barkers Creek area and Pink-eared Ducks at Bell's Swamp. Some of the interesting omissions from the list included Crested Pigeon, Australian White Ibis, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Buff-rumped Thornbill and Scarlet Robin.

The full list of species detected from the greater Castlemaine area is provided below. In this table, 'br' refers to a breeding observation. Thanks to everyone who took part in 2016, and we look forward to a good number of teams surveying a wide range of locations in the first weekend in December 2017. Contact Chris Timewell if you are interested in being involved (c_timewell@hotmail.com).

Black Swan	7	Striated Pardalote	10
Australian Shelduck	8 – Br	White-browed Scrubwren	3
Australian Wood Duck	73	Weebill	7
Pacific Black Duck	32 – br	Brown Thornbill	8
Grey Teal	22 – br	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	12
Chestnut Teal	2	Yellow Thornbill	8
Pink-eared Duck	12 - br	Striated Thornbill	5
Musk Duck	1	Red Wattlebird	35
Australasian Grebe	10	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	5
Hoary-headed Grebe	2	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	4
Little Pied Cormorant	6	White-plumed Honeyeater	31
White-faced Heron	9 – br	Fuscous Honeyeater	6
White-necked Heron	1	Brown-headed Honeyeater	2
Straw-necked Ibis	1	New Holland Honeyeater	4
Whistling Kite	3-br	Eastern Spinebill	1
Little Eagle	3	Jacky Winter	2 – br
Dusky Moorhen	14 – br	Eastern Yellow Robin	2
Eurasian Coot	17 – br	Crested Shrike Tit	4
Masked Lapwing	3	Grey Shrike Thrush	7
Rock Dove	6	Magpie-lark	9
Common Bronzewing	7 – br	Grey Fantail	8
Galah	49	Willie Wagtail	19
Long-billed Corella	121	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	13 – br
Little Corella	3	Olive-backed Oriole	3
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	8	Dusky Woodswallow	3
Musk Lorikeet	13	Australian Magpie	105
Crimson Rosella	30	Grey Currawong	1
Eastern Rosella	22	Australian Raven	45
Red-rumped Parrot	10	Little Raven	16
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	3	White-winged Chough	46
Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo	2	Rufous Songlark	4
Australian Owlet-nightjar	1	Austral Pipit	1
Powerful Owl	2 – br	House Sparrow	33
Laughing Kookaburra	3	Red-browed Finch	3
Sacred Kingfisher	4	European Goldfinch	2
Rainbow Bee-eater	6 – br	Welcome Swallow	130
Brown Treecreeper	5	Tree Martin	3
White-throated Treecreeper	2	Australian Reed-Warbler	3
Golden Whistler	1	Silvereye	2
Rufous Whistler	14	Common Blackbird	4
Superb Fairy-wren	39	Common Starling	11
Spotted Pardalote	10	Common Myna	5

Summer on the Bellarine

Joy Weatherill

During the Spring, there did not seem to be as many birds around as in recent years. The migratory birds were the most visible absentees; but with the amount of rain we had during winter, the water levels were too high for waders at places like Lake Victoria; and the water level at McLeod's Water Holes in Drysdale allowed no roosting spots on their low willow branches due again to too much water, so the hundred or so Freckled Duck were absent. One of the bird highlights of Spring however, was the pair of Brolgas with one chick, within sight of the Geelong - Barwon Heads road at Lake Connewarre.

Now the water levels have dropped and there are flocks of several hundred Red-necked Stints at Lake Victoria and half a dozen Black-winged Stilts - one juvenile Stilt with dark around the eye and on the crown. Other bird species at Lake Victoria include Australian White Ibis, Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Royal Spoonbill, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Pelicans, Masked Lapwing, White-fronted Chat and Red-capped Plover. Banded Stilts and Red-necked Avocets which are usually there in good numbers are absent.

In the evenings at Begola Wetlands in Ocean Grove, I have counted a dozen Latham's Snipe, but a greater number than this has been recorded. Latham's Snipe is a regular visitor to the Begola Wetlands. It breeds in Japan during our winter and migrates some 10,000 kms to be here in our summer months. This wetlands is part of a natural drainage system that runs from west to east behind the coastal sand dunes at Ocean Grove, for 7 km. through to Point Lonsdale and Swan Bay. The name 'Begola' comes from the Wathaurong word meaning 'place of many frogs', reflecting the large number of species that can be heard here, including the Southern Brown Tree Frog, the Spotted Marsh Frog, the Common Eastern Froglet and the Banjo Frog. At this wetlands I have also seen an Eastern Long-necked Turtle, and a great variety of other birds.

Another highlight this summer, has been watching the pair of Nankeen Kestrels patrolling the sand dunes of an evening before the sun goes down - between the Point Lonsdale lighthouse and the surf lifesaving club. They seem to be only getting small things - probably lizards and grasshoppers. Unfortunately this does not bode well for any Hooded Plovers who might nest in this area.





Summer on the Bellarine

Left: **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo**, McLeod's Waterholes.

Above: juvenile **Pacific Gull**, Pt. Lonsdale.

Below: **Latham's Snipe** at Begola Wetlands, and **Little Egrets** in full breeding plumage nested in a Stone Pine at Queenscliff





Summer on the Bellarine

Above: Dusky Moorhen (nest with a view) Minya Winery near Torquay

Below: Royal Spoonbill with Black-winged Stilts (juvenile at left), Lake Victoria



Cicada Rain

Joy Weatherill

Tree sap is the principal food of the cicada. They take the necessary nourishment and water from the sap, with waste matter and fluid accumulating in a rectal pouch. If it is necessary, the waste can be released and disposed of all at once through the anus.

Sorry Geraldine - this explains what was being sprayed over you on your walk!

April Observations 1947

George Broadway

What readers of "Wildlife" magazine were finding in April of 1947. Some we have already encountered.

Prahran: Old Lady Moth, *Dasypodia*. Caterpillar feeds on grass

Flinders Is: and Roxburgh: Ant Lion Lacewing. Ant Lion Larvae lurk at the bottom of the little pits they dig in loose sand waiting for an unwary ant to fall in. Also a Rutilid Fly; a large hairy bush fly which parasitises caterpillars keeping down the number of harmful insects.

Glen Iris: Caterpillars of the Wanderer Butterfly.

Newtown, Geelong: Wanderers again. *Danaida archippus* Native to North America but has spread to most parts of the world being a very strong flier. Caterpillars feed on the swan plant and other members of the Asclepiadaceae.

Northcote and Brighton: Young casemoths, cases as yet with a few small leaves, later they will add sticks. In numbers they may do some damage in the garden.

Geelong: Flower Wasp male. Slender and graceful while the females are wingless and often taken for ants.



Wanderer adult

Sandringham: Ptinus Beetles. Great pests which have spread all over the world as a stowaway.

Lah : Robber Fly. 2nd largest of Australian two-winged flies. Catches other insects on the wing and uses strong beak to suck them dry.

Red Hill : Assassin Bug. Was dragging a large bee into which it had stabbed its sucking-tube mouth. Feeds on insects and grubs of various sorts.

Rosedale: Convolvulus Hawk Moth. A very swift flier. The larvae, camouflaged with diagonal stripes feed on both cultivated and weed convolvulus or Bindweed.

Spiders

Canterbury: Long-tailed Spider, *Arachnura higginsii*. Fairly common in Victoria

Lorne : Slender Nephila Spider, member of a group which includes the large Golden web spinners

Glen Waverley: Spiny Spider, *Gasteracantha minax*, or Jewel Spider. Beautifully marked with a number of spines on the body. Usually gregarious, often several in a large untidy communal web. (That describes ones I have seen, however in the bush on Saturday the several we saw all seemed to be in individual fairly simple webs)

House Centipede or Johnny Hairy-legs or *Scutigera*. Illustrated in February N.L.



Above 1 - *Arachnura higginsii*
 Above 2 - Lictor case moth young
 Above right - Robber Fly
 Right - Wanderer pupa

Bird Quiz

Our mystery bird last month is the Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*. It is generally found in tall grassy areas near waterways. Also known as "Tailor bird" for the 'stitching' in its neat side entry nest.

The bird in our February newsletter was the Red Wattlebird. It is a member of the Honeyeater family and very common in our district. A fairly large bird which is also highly aggressive towards smaller birds. It has a yellowish breast and noticeable red wattles. It is very hard to confuse with other species. It is replaced in Tasmania by the Yellow Wattlebird – around the same size, but showing yellow wattles. There is one other Wattlebird, the Little Wattlebird which is much smaller and has no wattles at all. It is not usually found in domestic surroundings, preferring more remote regions.

This month's bird is supplied by Nigel.

Though not common, it is often seen around Castlemaine.



Nature Diary - February

Denis Hurley - around home at Merri st., and Expedition Pass



February 6 -

Above - Elephant Weevil

Above right - Caterpillar sp. not known (length 25mm)

Right - Paropsisterna sp? 8mm. on appleberry seed pod with raindrops.



Feb 8 Four Blue-banded Bees at Dianella, and Yellow - faced Honeyeaters feasting on seed pods of the Pale Vanilla Lily

9 Crimson Rosellas after seed on Ruby saltbush and Dianella at back porch

11 A Black Wallaby crossing the dry creek - first sighting for many weeks

" Expedition Pass; (while paddling kayak) 1 Purple Swamphen, >20 Clamorous Reed-warbler, 1 Sacred Kingfisher, 2 Black Duck, Eurasian Coot (4 juv., 2 adult), 1 Musk Duck female.

13 Expedition Pass; 2 White-faced Heron, 1 Black Cormorant, 11 Reed-warbler, 2 juv. Eurasian Coot, 1 female Musk Duck, 3 Purple Swamphen, and 1 juvenile Swamphen. Also dozens of Mosquito fish at the beach area.

15 a.m. - pair of Common Bronzewing Pigeons in backyard

16 Expedition Pass; am., Four E. Coot chicks (1 still chirping and very small) , 1 juv. Swamphen, 1 adult E. Coot, 1 Black Cormorant, >10 Reed-warbler, 1 Wedge-tailed Eagle. 2 White-faced Herons, and a Yellow-faced Honeyeater heard.

18 2.30pm, at bird bath: Red Wattle-birds, 2 Spotted Pardalote, 10 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, 4 Brown-headed Honeyeaters, 1 Grey Fantail, 2 immature Rufous Whistler, 1 Grey Shrike-thrush, 2 Silvereye

22 Very hot and windy. An immature Brown Goshawk in front garden.

23 noon - 2 Blue-banded bees working Dianella

24 Discovered (painfully) that the Paper Wasps at the back door are really grumpy on a hot afternoon

- 25 11 a.m., Black Wallaby east of house heading into thick understory; a Jolly Jumping spider with missing foreleg on the back door (5-6 mm long)
- 26 8.30 am., "Lady" duck (Aus black) has returned after a month, without partner "limpy". Both left on Jan 25.
- 11 a.m., bird bath and environs - 6 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, 1 Spotted Pardalote, 4 adult, 2 juv. Silvereye, 1 Grey Fantail, 1 Grey Shrike-thrush, 4 Red Wattle-birds (the bullies), 10 Red-browed Finches, 2 male and 7 female Superb Fairy-wren. The Grey Shrike-thrush has been carolling several days for up to 20m. Could it be happy the silly season is over?
- 2 pm., A White-throated Treecreeper working the Black She-oak.
- 7 pm., 2 BB Bees working a potted Dianella
- 27 Expedition Pass; a.m., 1 juv, 2 adult Purple Swamphen, 1 Little Pied Cormorant, 4 juv. Eurasian Coot, >10 Clamorous Reed-warbler.

**Photo observation
by
Claire Morgan**

Leaden Flycatcher (female)
near Glenluce, March 2017



Our April speaker Emmi van Harten

Local PhD student, Emmi van Harten is fascinated with the world of bats. For the past two years she has been researching the critically endangered southern bent-wing bat in South Australia. With the help of 45 volunteers, Emmi has



microchipped almost 2000 bats and is shedding light on the lives of these elusive mammals to inform recovery of the population.

During the presentation, Emmi will share stories about bats, her research and the findings so far, as well as her inevitable transformation into 'Batgirl'. The story will start and end here, in the box-ironbark forests around Castlemaine, Victoria.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri April 7* meeting: speaker EMMI VAN HARTEN with new research into micro-bats

* NB. Meeting a week earlier to avoid Easter

Sat April 8 field trip: to Smiths Reef area for autumn orchids

Fri May 12 meeting: speaker JASON EDWARDS

Sat May 20 : Roadside clean-up

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2017

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2017 Committee

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